

# AF publishing: not just paper and boxes anymore

**By Lauren Mednick**

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When the Air Force publishing community was asked how they planned to take the current publishing program into the 21st century, they simply replied "We're not."

Instead, they took the basic concepts behind conventional publishing and embarked on a journey that would lead them away from the ideas of traditional Air Force forms and publications, and into the world of information management. Today, what we once called forms are now called Information management tools, or IMTs; Air Force personnel worldwide have switched from the JetForm software to PureEdge's IMT technology; and data standardization efforts are underway.

Understanding that to be a part of this new world meant the reevaluation of certain "sacred" publishing concepts, Air Force publishers began to recognize forms as merely "information gatherers," and publications as simply "information providers." The focus became the data, not the vehicle in which it traveled. To make best use of the data and eliminate the duplicity of individual "stove-pipe" systems, standardization was a requirement to move forward.

"We're changing our whole approach to focus on content and user interaction," said Carolyn Watkins-Taylor, director, Air Force Departmental Publishing Office, or AFDPO. "The primary goal is to make things easier on the user and easier on

the Air Force by replacing an obsolete system. We're taking a content approach rather than just worrying about what the forms or the boxes look like. The IMT technology allows us to do all of this and more."

As lead command for this Air Force-wide initiative, AFDPO started by replacing the current commercial off-the-shelf, or COTS, electronic forms software with PureEdge's Internet Commerce System COTS application.

The PureEdge ICS, an IMT, consists of two COTS desktop products, the IMT viewer and the IMT designer. The IMT viewer is a lightweight (less than 10MB) desktop program that expands on the functionality of the current Air Force forms program (e.g., JetForm FormFlow, allowing users to efficiently view, fill, save, and route IMTs, or e-forms. The IMT designer is a desktop-hosted program that allows IMT designers to create and modify the IMTs that users will view and fill.

## **Leave No One Behind**

The IMT viewer can be operated locally as a stand-alone executable or used as an extension to the user's Web browser via a plug-in. IMTs are "nomadic," allowing users to complete them offline, without a network connection or client-server activity. Users with network connectivity can e-mail IMTs with a simple mouse click, using standard Air Force e-mail software. Users without network connectivity can send the completed IMT via electronic media (CD, floppy, etc.) or print and then

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phone number and an e-mail link for the Web RIMS help desk and development team.

Web RIMS capabilities will be introduced to initial (3-level) and craftsman (7-level) communications and information trainees at Keesler AFB, Miss.

AFCA redesigned the latest RIMS release to exploit Web technology. This strategy eliminates reliance on client software installed across the enterprise on

multiple desktop operating systems. In addition, it preempts future software incompatibility issues associated with desktop operating system updates.

"We feel a Web-based platform residing on a central server offers the best total cost of ownership while providing maximum capability," said Morton. AFCA developed Web RIMS during the past year and a half at a cost of \$400,000, according to Morton.

RIMS architectural design uses an Oracle database to store user file plan data and staging

area data. RIMS Web pages were developed using HTML and ColdFusion MX. Users will access Web RIMS by a Web browser. The current customer base for Web RIMS is estimated to be more than 80,000 offices of record Air Force-wide.

Web RIMS 3.0 provides real-time management of the Air Force records program. Watch for accessibility coming soon to your base.

For more information, call (618) 229-6900 or DSN 779-6900.



*Photo by Tech. Sgt. Michael Leonard*

**AFCA's Master Sgt. Wayne Repke, U.S. Air Force Computer Based Training Program manager, fills in an AF Form 1297, temporary issue receipt, on his PC using the PureEdge ICS information management tool viewer.**

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add a wet signature and deliver it for processing as hardcopy. IMTs are based in extensible markup language and completely encapsulate the presentation, logic and data into a single, signable, portable object.

"We recognize now more than ever that any modernization program we initiate must include methods of providing our warfighters with an optimal level of support," Watkins-Taylor said. "We are excited at the potential opportunities that this kind of cutting-edge technology can provide, especially when it translates into a more efficient and effective support method."

Additionally, because personnel, medical and financial information will be available globally and around-the-clock, Air Force members will be able to accomplish actions in those areas, regardless of their location.

"In the future, when airmen want to perform personnel or finance actions, they will no longer go to the personnel flight or down to the finance office. They will do the majority of that online, 24 hours a day, with self-service capabilities," said John Gilligan, Air Force chief information officer. "Physical location will no longer be a limit."

### **A small footprint**

The IMT viewer and individual IMTs reside on the desktop and use existing Air Force browser and e-mail applications. The average size of designed IMTs is between 40K and 400K. The IMT viewer can be operated locally as a stand-alone execut-

able, or used as an extension to the user's Web browser via a plug-in. The Web browser plug-in employs an active document server for operation within Internet Explorer (Dynamic Linked Library). Similarly, under Netscape the component operates as a standard plug-in. The stand-alone viewer uses no embedded mobile code and active cookies are not required or used.

The IMT Designer allows designers to create IMTs through a drag-and-drop interface that permits development of business logic (validation checks, calculations, default values, etc.) into the IMT. A drag-and-drop tool for designing XFDL IMTs, IMT designer allows rapid creation of complex, dynamic IMTs. Users select IMT objects from the menu, drag them into position on the IMT page, then open a tabbed dialog to set properties, such as formatting, default values, templates, calculations, and URLs. The IMT designer resides on the desktop and operates as a stand-alone executable. For document preview, the user can launch IMT viewer and load the current IMT with a single button click.

### **The phases of progress**

As part of the first phase, electronic forms are being converted to IMTs and will closely resemble the FormFlow version. Subsequent phases will produce more intelligent IMTs, to include ad hoc routing, digital signatures and interactive interfaces with functional legacy systems.

"Our Air Force customers really like the ad hoc routing," which enables users to e-mail IMTs back and forth, Watkins-Taylor said, adding that users will also be able to "sign everything on the IMT in one place," once the Air Force digital signature capability has been established.

"The problem before was that users would save a [partially completed form] and then not be able to find it," she said. "Now it looks like a Microsoft Word document; they name and save it."

Partnerships with several Air Force functional communities are under way to integrate the XML-based IMTs directly into their legacy systems for a Web-based solution for information gathering and transfer. Or, reengineering of a current process that capitalizes on state-of-the-art technology, is being accomplished. The reengineered OES/EES process using PureEdge and the IBM Content Management System technologies, to be implemented later this year, will clearly show the power of the software and the value-added contribution it can make in all functional areas.